Stay interview basics

When planning stay interviews, consider these basic tips:

* Schedule them ahead of time, so employees know they’re important.
* Give employees time to prepare their thoughts (which shouldn’t be a problem if you’ve scheduled the interview ahead of time).
* Make sure you tell the employee why you’re having the meeting and what you’re going to be talking about.
* Pick a setting where they’ll feel comfortable to express their true feelings about the organization and what they desire.

You can treat these similarly to performance reviews from a logistical standpoint, but the objective should remain different. Make sure to schedule stay interviews months away from annual performance reviews, whenever possible, to keep them separate.

With the right stay interview questions, you’ll get a handle on how you can [improve employee retention](https://www.insperity.com/blog/10-rules-for-employee-retention-your-competition-will-hate/).

Question #1

*“What kind of feedback or recognition would you like about your performance that you aren’t currently receiving?”*

This question gives employees the ability to vocalize any concerns they may have from a recognition standpoint. Some people may need very little assurance or kudos that they’re doing a good job. Others, meanwhile, may [thrive on being recognized](https://www.insperity.com/blog/52-epic-ways-to-reward-your-employees/) when they’ve done a great job.

It’s possible, when your company first started, that your original team didn’t need that confirmation or validation. As your team grows in size, however, you’ll have a variety of personalities and work styles.

Asking this question pinpoints what each individual is looking for in terms of recognition and feedback.

Question #2

*“What*[*opportunities for self-improvement*](https://www.insperity.com/blog/self-coach-using-power-neuroscience/)*would you like to have that go beyond your current role?”*

If you’re able to offer them the opportunity to take relevant online courses or travel to industry conferences, this is a great question to ask. This is their chance to speak up and ask for further education or learning related to their role in your organization.

If this isn’t an area where you can invest money in your employees, do some research on training opportunities that are free or cost very little. You might be surprised how much you’re able to find that doesn’t require dipping into your budget.

For instance, [HubSpot](https://academy.hubspot.com/certification%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) offers many free certification courses for sales and marketing professionals through its online academy. And several other Internet-based learning portals also offer free or low-cost courses for a range of professions and industries.

Even if you’re not in a position to pay for your employees’ training and development at this point in your business journey, you can demonstrate your desire to help them get what they need to be successful.

Consider allowing employees to use work time to take advantage of the training resources available to them, so they’re not having to cram it in on their own time.

Bottom line: Don’t rule out self-improvement opportunities for your employees just because you don’t have a big budget. With a little creativity, you’ll likely find plenty of [cost-effective employee training and development](https://www.insperity.com/blog/cost-effective-employee-training-and-development/) to support your team’s continuing education.

Question #3

*“What kinds of flexibility would be helpful to you in balancing your work and home life?”*

There are tons of companies out there today being extremely generous with [working from home](https://www.insperity.com/blog/managing-remote-employees/), paid time off and flexible hours to help with work-life balance. It’s a competitive market and lots of people are beginning to expect more.

Before asking this question, know what you are able to offer up to them. Don’t promise or tease with things you can’t deliver. You may be in an organization where there isn’t a lot of flexibility on hours or vacation time (and there may be valid reasons for that).

If the employee says they would love to have the option to work remotely once a week, don’t give them hope that it’s possible unless it is.

Question #4

*What talents, interests or skills do you have that we haven’t made the most of?*

It’s possible things at your organization move quickly and some people aren’t being utilized to their potential. Asking this question could illuminate solutions to problems you’re having while giving an employee [more fulfilling responsibilities](https://www.insperity.com/blog/internal-mobility/) to take on.

For example, maybe you have an employee who’s been there for a decade and is overloaded with a dozen different random tasks they take care of every month – because when they started, they were the only option.

It’s highly likely newer employees could be quickly trained to help lighten tenured employees’ workloads. By freeing up some of the time they currently spend on repetitive tasks, you’ll allow them to get more involved in other efforts that better utilize their talents and pique their interests.

The answer to this stay interview question may shed light on areas where employees could be helping you but currently aren’t.

Question #5

*What have you felt good about accomplishing in your job and in your time here?*

This question is simple and allows you to pinpoint the projects they’ve worked on that have given them joy or a sense of pride. That way, you can keep this information in mind when assigning future projects and responsibilities.

At the end of the day, [happy employees](https://www.insperity.com/blog/happy-employees-can-help-market-business/) are usually more productive, loyal employees.

Question #6

*If you could change one thing about your job, team or company, what would it be?*

Here is the employee’s chance to speak up about concerns they have about spending the rest of their career with you. It may highlight bigger problems you didn’t know you had. For example, maybe one team is requesting work from another team at the last minute every month, and you had no idea.

Based on the number of people reporting this information to you in their stay interviews, you may decide to act on it.

At the very least, it gives the employee in the stay interview [a forum to voice any problems](https://www.insperity.com/blog/4-must-use-listening-techniques-leaders/) they’re having to someone in power. These are things you probably won’t talk about in individual performance review meetings.

What not to ask in a stay interview

Stay interviews may not feel worthwhile if you ask yes-or-no and closed-ended questions. Avoid asking your employees:

* Are you happy working here?
* Do you make enough money?

And don’t feel obligated to interview all of your employees about why they stay. Start with the members of your staff who have been with you longest and who consistently do well on performance reviews.

Aim to conduct your stay interviews with these [high-performing employees](https://www.insperity.com/blog/4-ways-to-continue-to-get-the-most-out-of-high-performers/) at least once per year, scheduling them separately from performance reviews so the goals of each remain distinct.

The best stay interview questions

The best stay interview questions help your most valuable employees understand:

* You recognize and appreciate their loyalty.
* You care about more than just their performance.
* You’re open to making changes that would bring them more satisfaction.

And they help you discover:

* Warning signs that indicate a key player needs more support or direction
* Ways to keep the employees in which you’ve invested the most time and resources
* Low-cost changes that could reaffirm your employees’ commitment and engagement

Replacing your leading employees can be time-consuming and costly. Stay interviews are a solid strategy to help you retain your business’s top performers.